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CERAMICS AND CERAMIC PAINTING.

TO all who seek recreation in art-work, and are withal skillful in drawing and painting, ceramics would appear to offer a most attractive field. Were painting on china and other choice descriptions of ceramic ware more general among amateurs, the influence of novel and tasteful designs produced by them—for, in countless instances, we might be assured of both—would possibly extend to our china and stone-china manufactories, where color decorations, chiefly executed by foreigners, have too much of the formalism of imitative work. Elaborate decoration will not, as a rule, pay commercially, in face of foreign competition; but the amateur, presuming that, after long trial, high success has been achieved, has the opportunity of producing such work. At the same time, simple designs, well chosen and well executed, may invest a vase or other article with special attractions, and there is abundant scope for originality. Decorative ceramics thrive on novelties, and choice designs have an appreciable mercantile value. But what is to be specially held in view is the satisfaction obtainable from one's own handiwork in this line, besides the opportunity given of making contributions to the decoration of apartments, whether the paintings be executed on breakfast, dinner, dessert or table-sets, jugs, services, plaques, vases or tiles, or on medallions for insertion in panels. The work allows of beautiful and enduring representations, in colors more brilliant than those of canvas, of occurrences that belong to family traditions, and of such events as birthdays and marriages. With this home art might be revived the olden custom of Italy in producing *amatorii* or love gifts, by placing on plates, jugs, saucers or vases the portraits of the receivers or appropriate emblems of the devotion of the givers, with appropriate legends. One of these Italian engagement or betrothal plates—always, by the way, filled with flowers when presented—bears a heart in ruby luster, pierced with arrows; above, two hands, the male hand offering a ring; beneath, yellow lustrous flames, the light from which is made to appear reflected on the white ground about the ruby figures on the border. Another amatory dish, by a famous Italian painter, has a wounded heart, a female head, and the inscription, *Daniella Diva.*

We know, too, that paintings on ceramic ware have served to perpetuate historic events as well as to record the changing currents of thought and sentiment. Frederick the Great, who exchanged twenty-two vases with Augustus, Elector of Saxony, for a troop of horse, at the rate of about three men for each vase, was himself glorified in the magnificent porcelain services turned out from the royal manufactory at Berlin, and which aimed to rival the productions of Dresden. Much of the old ceramic ware to be met with in France in palaces, museums, chateaux and cottages, is expressive of the political and social moods prevailing at the periods when it was fabricated. Thus, on tureens, dishes and jugs turned out in 1792, the new-born French constitution is commemorated with farming and garden implements, supplanting the previous royalistic emblems, and the words, "*Vive la Nation!*" and "*Vive l'Agriculture,*" taking the place of "*Vive le Roi!*" The fall of the Bastile occasioned a violent ceramic demonstration of the event. Under the Directory appeared the Phrygian bonnet and the tree of liberty, surrounded by dancing children, surmounted with scrolls bearing the words, "Let us dance the Carmagnole!" and "Hurrah for the sound of the cannon!" The Consulate was the occasion for the excessive display on ceramic ware of military emblems and small eagles. With the advent of the Empire in the person of Napoleon, his military triumphs were, in like manner, portrayed on costly vases and table sets, besides finding symbolic representation on the soup plates and salad bowls of the people. With the return of the Bourbons, lilies were in the ascendant; but when Philip Egalité fled from his throne, the Gallic cock, with outstretched wings, figured on fashionable services. In England Bow, Chelsea, Liverpool and Winchester pottery fell in with the national defiance of the Napoleonic scheme of invasion and unmercifully caricatured the Little Corporal. When the slave trade was at its height, pottery, in glaring colors announced, "Success to the African Slave Trade!"

Every eastern nation would seem to have its own types of form, and even its favorite colors in ceramic art. An illustration as to form is found in the egg and melon-shaped vases of the Scinde and Punjaub; and so with colors, as to which we find the sombre spirit of the Egyptians asserting itself in gloomy hues, unrelieved by lightsome flashes; the Persian rejoicing in brilliant colors, as significant of artistic temperament.

The Chinese ceramic artists do not preoccupy themselves with shades and association of tones. Their vases, with a crowd of kiosks, flowers and birds, have no shadow to give effect of distance or relief; discarding perspective, they aim to ornament a vase so as to satisfy the eye with the color. Where they give a figure, an ordinary touch suffices for the expressionless visage; the aim is to set forth brilliant effects in the habiliments. Dealing almost exclusively in color, they delight in presenting us with apples, cherries, peaches, beautiful woods, the lotus and the bamboo, in their decorative porcelain, on which may be seen flowers and ornaments in abundance, without profusion, without any pretension to deceive the eye, and produce a lifelike painting. Their productions, even those which have grotesque traits, aim at pure decoration. Dragons of the heavens, sea and earth carry out the same conception. They use fewer colors than our ceramic artists do; but look at the variety of these! Take their hues of white, in which appear ivory and rice, cream, snow-white and egg-white hues, the application showing exquisite discrimination. Their very blacks reflect hues of brown and violet, so suiting all tints. It is this richness and variety of color, as displayed by nature in flowers and birds, and not in sombre shadows, that renders a Chinese vase such a cheerful object. The Japanese, who delight to employ a pale, neutral ground, and avoid the overcrowding of figures, so conspicuous in Chinese art, aim to represent flowers and birds, herons, aquatic plants, and other natural objects, with marvelous fidelity—with a beautiful confidence in their instinctive resources, careless as to the disposition, or, as some would say, arrangement of these, their products having the transcendent merit, wanting in Chinese productions, of being stamped with individuality, which asserts itself in spite of their foregoing any regularity in their disposition of objects, and bringing out, apparently by chance as they do, novel effects. Chinese productions bear the trace of numerous hands; Japanese, those of one designing mind.

And here a word may be said as to the materials on which fine-art painting in ceramics is executed. As to what is true porcelain, vague impressions generally prevail. There are hard and soft porcelains which, after cooling, have great consistency, and in which the hardness of the glaze defies the best-tempered steel instruments. Soft porcelain is transparent, and kaolin, a clay, suffices, without any addition, to constitute a body; it is white, easy to work, and takes in firing a fine transparency. The glaze, which is fired at the same time as the paste, is wholly of decomposed feldspathic rock. The difficulties to be overcome in the firing, which vitrifies the glaze are preventing the fine colors being banished from the ground, and the painting being incorporated in the glaze which lies on its surface. Hard porcelain is not transparent, and is an artificial composition, of which kaolin, however, is the chief. Clay of common body, when covered with transparent and colored glazes, and fixed by fire, becomes faïence. For common and opaque faïence, marling and loamy clays and calcareous marls suffice.

Stoneware, in contrast to fine porcelain, is composed of fine paste, of pure, plastic kaolin, and feldspar, and occupies a position between hard porcelain and English faïence. The clay, through being blended with quatorze sand, becomes dense and strong. It is this stoneware—commonly called china stoneware—that constitutes the bulk of American production in the pottery line.

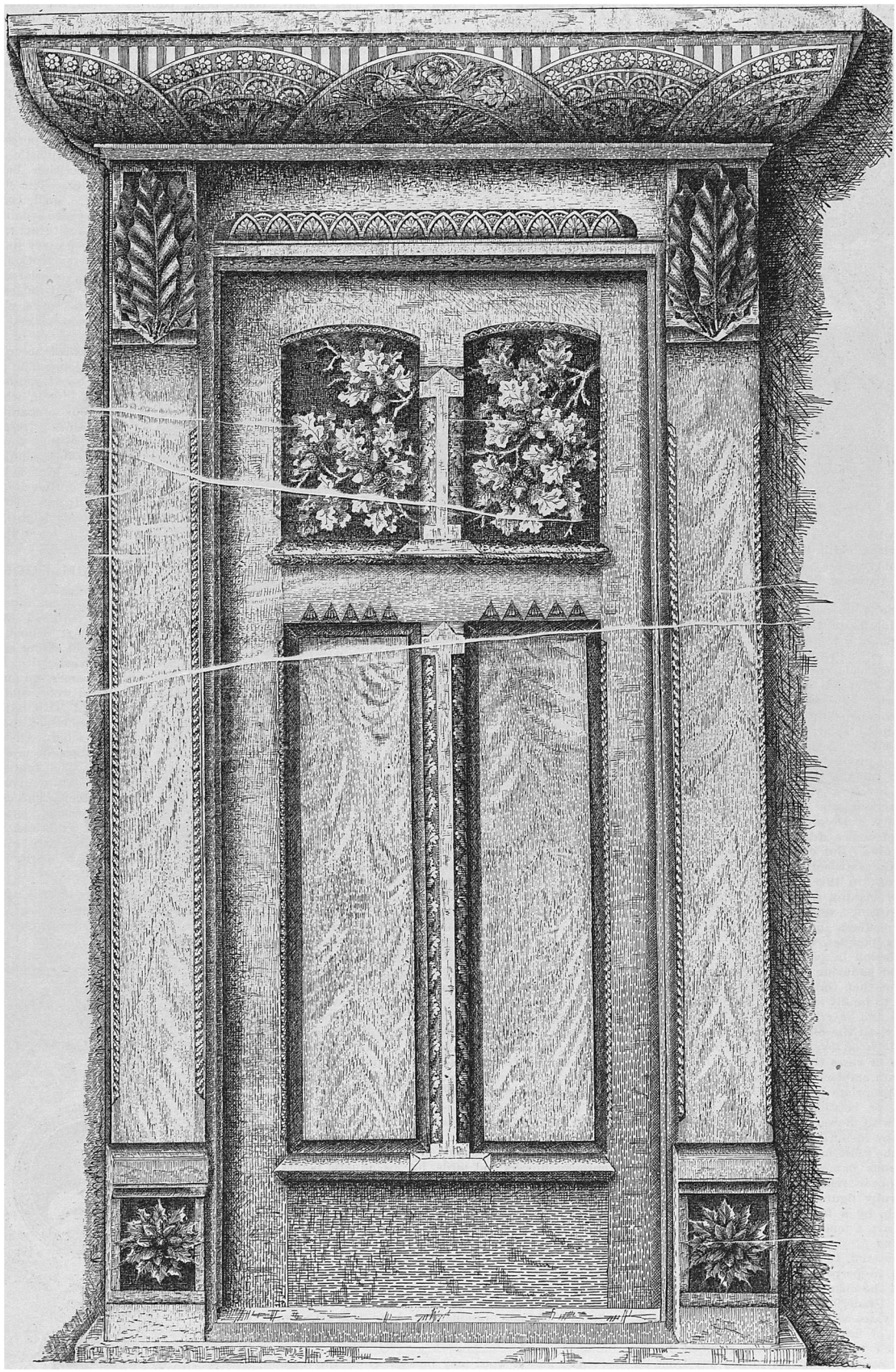
If the clay is of a fine description, white and covered with a transparent, uncolored glaze, the result is cream-colored ware and different kinds of faïence. Palissy is composed of a clay, slightly colored, covered with different glazes, which have been previously colored by means of metallic oxides—these glazes being applied according to the requirements of the decoration. The principle on which the manufacture is based consists of painting, with metallic colors, on biscuit, whitened with a layer of hard stranniferous preparation, which, after completion of the painting, receives a thin smear of transparent glaze, so that the painting is between two layers of vitreous composition. In firing the composition, if the heat is too low, the painting will be hard in outline; if too high, it will lose strength and brilliancy. The treatment is such that the colors merge slightly into each other, so that the outline is not too distinctive.

SITTING-ROOM DOOR.

WE present on page 179 an illustration of a sitting-room door, designed by Mr. Benn Pitman, of the Cincinnati Art School, and carved by his pupils. The door and casing are of cherry, slightly stained and darkened, with hard shellac finish. The pilasters and panels are made of beautifully marked and mottled wood, and are, therefore left undecorated, except with nature's exquisite touches. The upper panels of the door show an oak branch cut in bold relief. All the chamfers on both casing and door are decorated, the flat surfaces being left plain. The center mullion is unusually bold, but this feature gives an air of protective strength to the door. This characteristic piece of carving was one of many specimens from the Cincinnati Art School, exhibited at the New Orleans World's Fair, and justly earned a certificate of the highest order of merit.

OUR college course aims to give us a thorough education in literature and science; it certainly graduates us at the dime-novel stage of art.—*Edmund Russell.*

FRENCH CERAMIC PANEL.



SITTING-ROOM DOOR. DESIGNED BY BENN PITMAN. CARVED BY THE PUPILS OF THE CINCINNATI ART SCHOOL. (FOR DESCRIPTION, SEE PAGE 180.)